

## CLAIMS

1. An apparatus for receiving and processing suggestions, comprising:

5 a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

a plurality of innovation zones within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed, wherein said innovation zones comprise any of:

10 a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company;

15 and

a point of entry for third party submissions;

a mechanism that routes said suggestions to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party;

20 at least one central database into which said suggestions are categorized based upon key words;

a mechanism for viewing said suggestions to allow peer review and/or comment;

25 a response module that automatically sends an acknowledgement to said submitting party when a suggestion is submitted by said submitting party, wherein said acknowledgement comprises any of a Web based response and an email message;

a linking module for linking said suggestions to related suggestions, wherein related suggestions are cross-referenced to minimize entry of duplicate suggestions;

an acknowledgement module for automatic emailing of specific types of suggestions to specific areas of responsibility within a company;

a status module that tracks progression of a suggestion through a review, comment, and approval process; and

5 a statistics module that reports cumulative submissions in a predetermined format;

wherein said mechanism comprises a page based dialog; and  
wherein said central portal comprises a Web page.

10 2. An apparatus for receiving and processing suggestions, comprising:

a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

a plurality of innovation zones within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed; and

15 a mechanism that routes said suggestions to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party.

3. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

20 at least one central database into which said suggestions are categorized based upon key words.

4. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said mechanism comprises a page based dialog.

25 5. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said central portal comprises a Web page.

6. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

a mechanism for viewing said suggestions to allow peer review and/or comment.

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7. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

a response module that automatically sends an acknowledgement to said submitting party when a suggestion is submitted by said submitting party.

5 8. The apparatus of Claim 8, wherein said acknowledgement comprises any of a Web based response and an email message.

9. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said innovation zones comprise any of:

10 a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

15 a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company; and

a point of entry for third party submissions.

10. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

20 a linking module for linking said suggestions to related suggestions, wherein related suggestions are cross-referenced to minimize entry of duplicate suggestions.

11. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

25 an acknowledgement module for automatic emailing of specific types of suggestions to specific areas of responsibility within a company.

12. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

a status module that tracks progression of a suggestion through a review, comment, and approval process.

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13. The apparatus of Claim 2, further comprising:

a statistics module that reports cumulative submissions in a predetermined format.

5 14. A network-based application that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, comprising:

a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

multiple points of entry comprising innovation groups within said receiving  
10 party to which said suggestions can be routed from said central portal and which can also receive said suggestions directly; and

a mechanism that routes said suggestions to a most appropriate one or more of said multiple points of entry in response to an interaction with said submitting party;

15 wherein said multiple points of entry comprise any of:

an entry portal, which is a single point of entry to said network-based application;

a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

20 a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company; and

25 a point of entry for third party submissions.

15. The application of Claim 14, wherein for each suggestion any of the following types of information to be attached to said suggestion:

a review comment;

30 a peer review comment;

a link to a document or presentation; and  
a related idea.

16. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

5 a torchbearer function performed by an executive participant and advocate  
in said application.

17. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

a view module that allows viewing of a list of latest submissions.

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18. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

a view module that, for said central portal, returns a list of submissions to  
all points of entry; and that, for said points of entry, returns a list of submissions  
to an appropriate innovation group.

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19. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

a search module that allows entry of search criteria to return a list of  
matching submissions.

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20. The application of Claim 19, said search module comprising any of:

a search for submissions a user has submitted;  
a search for submissions said user has saved but not submitted; and  
a search of an implementation zone for ideas that have been approved,  
but for which there are no current resources to implement.

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21. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

a submission dialog comprising one or more qualification questions.

22. The application of Claim 21, wherein said one or more qualification questions determine a submitting party's desired degree of ownership of an implementation process for said submitting party's suggestion.

5 23. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
an adoption module for soliciting sponsorship of an unowned suggestion.

24. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
a steering committee that receives, reviews, and disposes of suggestions.

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25. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
a peer rating module that allows individuals to rate suggestions.

26. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
15 a statistics module by which statistics are provided based upon suggestions submitted over various time intervals and by point of entry.

27. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
a status table for displaying actions taken or to be taken, based upon any  
20 of point of entry and category.

28. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
a related suggestion link wherein a related suggestion is located and a  
user is asked to confirm if said suggestion is similar to a suggestion submitted or  
25 to be submitted by said user or not and, if not, optionally to indicate why.

29. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:  
a dialog by which customer testimonials are captured.

30 30. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

a link within a network page that takes a user directly to a suggestion submission dialog.

31. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

5 an incentive module that implements an incentive program.

32. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

a page that provides contact information.

10 33. The application of Claim 14, further comprising:

an award module with which award winners are listed.

34. A storage medium comprising a computer implemented process stored therein, said process comprising a network-based application that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, said process comprising:

15 providing multiple portals; and

directing suggestions to a most appropriate portal, such that they are considered by most appropriate persons.

20 35. The storage medium of Claim 34, said process further comprising:

providing a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

25 providing multiple points of entry comprising innovation groups within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed from said central portal and which can also receive said suggestions directly; and

providing a mechanism that routes said suggestions to a most appropriate one or more of said multiple points of entry in response to an interaction with said submitting party.

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36. The storage medium of Claim 35, wherein said multiple points of entry comprise any of:

an entry portal, which is a single point of entry to said network-based application;

5 a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

10 a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company;

and

a point of entry for third party submissions.

37. An apparatus for receiving and processing suggestions, comprising:

15 central portal means for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

a plurality of innovation zone means within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed; and

20 means for routing said suggestions to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party.

38. A network-based application that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, comprising:

25 a central portal means for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

multiple points of entry comprising innovation groups within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed from said central portal and which can also receive said suggestions directly; and



means for routing said suggestions to a most appropriate one or more of said multiple points of entry in response to an interaction with said submitting party;

wherein said multiple points of entry comprise any of:

5 an entry portal, which is a single point of entry to said network-based application;

a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

10 a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company; and

a point of entry for third party submissions.

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39. A process for receiving and processing suggestions, comprising:

providing a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

20 providing a plurality of innovation zones within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed; and

routing said suggestions to one or more of said innovation zones in response to an interaction with said submitting party.

25 40. A network-based process that allows employees to submit suggestions and ideas for improving how a company does business, comprising:

providing a central portal for receiving suggestions from a submitting party on behalf of a receiving party;

30 providing multiple points of entry comprising innovation groups within said receiving party to which said suggestions can be routed from said central portal and which can also receive said suggestions directly; and

routing said suggestions to a most appropriate one or more of said multiple points of entry in response to an interaction with said submitting party;

wherein said multiple points of entry comprise any of:

an entry portal, which is a single point of entry to said network-based application;

a point of entry for employees within a specific business unit in a larger entity for submission of suggestions related to said business unit;

a point of entry for motivated submitters with an idea about how to change said company's business;

a central point of entry for ideas and suggestions;

a point of entry for ideas on improving a specific aspect of said company; and

a point of entry for third party submissions.

41. The process of Claim 40, wherein for each suggestion any of the following types of information to be attached to said suggestion:

a review comment;

a peer review comment;

a link to a document or presentation; and

a related idea.

42. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a torchbearer function performed by an executive participant and advocate in said application.

43. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a view module that allows viewing of a list of latest submissions.

44. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a view module that, for said central portal, returns a list of submissions to all points of entry; and that, for said points of entry, returns a list of submissions to an appropriate innovation group.

5 45. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a search module that allows entry of search criteria to return a list of matching submissions.

46. The process of Claim 45, said search module comprising any of:

10 searching for submissions a user has submitted;  
searching for submissions said user has saved but not submitted; and  
searching an implementation zone for ideas that have been approved, but for which there are no current resources to implement.

15 47. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a submission dialog comprising one or more qualification questions.

48. The process of Claim 47, wherein said one or more qualification questions  
20 determine a submitting party's desired degree of ownership of an implementation process for said submitting party's suggestion.

49. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

25 providing an adoption module for soliciting sponsorship of an unowned suggestion.

50. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:

providing a steering committee that receives, reviews, and disposes of suggestions.

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51. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing a peer rating module that allows individuals to rate suggestions.

52. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
5 a statistics module by which statistics are provided based upon  
suggestions submitted over various time intervals and by point of entry.

53. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing a status table for displaying actions taken or to be taken, based  
10 upon any of point of entry and category.

54. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing a related suggestion link wherein a related suggestion is located  
and a user is asked to confirm if said suggestion is similar to a suggestion  
15 submitted or to be submitted by said user or not and, if not, optionally to indicate  
why.

55. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing a dialog by which customer testimonials are captured.  
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56. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing a link within a network page that takes a user directly to a  
suggestion submission dialog.

25 57. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing an incentive module that implements an incentive program.

58. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing a page that provides contact information.  
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59. The process of Claim 40, further comprising:  
providing an award module with which award winners are listed.

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